Session Notes

Session: Building Resilience to Food-Borne Diseases and Public Health Shocks in East Asia and the Pacific

Chair: LINXIU ZHANG, Professor and Deputy Director, Center for Chinese Agricultural Policy, Chinese Academy of Sciences, China

Panelists: XIANGMING FANG, Chair, Department of Applied Economics, China Agricultural University, China

NGUYEN VIET HUNG, Scientist, Food Safety and Zoonoses Program, International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) in Vietnam and Center for Public Health and Ecosystem Research (CENPHER), Hanoi School of Public Health, Vietnam

AGUSDIN PULUNGAN, President, Indonesia Farmers and Fishers Society Organisation (WAMTI), Indonesia

GIBSON SUSUMU, Food Security Officer, Land Resources Division, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Fiji Islands

EMORN UDOMKESMALEE (WASANTWISUT), Senior Advisor, Institute of Nutrition, Mahidol University, Thailand

Rapporteur: CHENGFANG LIU, Associate Professor, Center for Chinese Agricultural Policy, Chinese Academy of Sciences, China

This parallel session was comprised of five panellists from China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Fiji Islands, and Thailand. They sought a) a better understanding of the concern about food-borne disease (FBD) and public health shocks in the east Asia and the Pacific region; b) to share knowledge about best practices, particularly with respect to tackle the FBD and public health shocks in this region; c) to explore integrated and cohesive approach—at national, sub-national as well as regional levels; and d) to identify matters concerning building resilience to FBD and public health shocks that require further evidence. The discussion in this session was lively with contributions from the audience, although the audience slightly outnumbered the panellists, partially due to the location of the session venue. The purpose of this report is to summarize the main points made during the session.

1. Food-borne disease (FBD) and public health shocks are a common concern, regardless of countries. Unfortunately, people do not perceive FBD and public health shocks correctly. Moreover, FBD shocks have not attracted as much attention as climate changes have.

2. One of the main causes is consumption of contaminated food. Contamination itself comes from many sources, such as irrigation using waste water from industrial factories, inappropriate application of night soil, human fecus and chemical fertilizer, epidemics (e.g., avian flu), poor food quality, etc.

3. To tackle FBD and public health shocks is challenging, like many other shocks that we have been discussing over the past two days. To reduce FBD coming from farming, we should focus on reducing contamination. Contamination spans throughout all stages of the food chain, from production, processing, distribution, marketing, all the way through consumption. It is multi-stage (from farm to mouth), multi-sectoral, and trans-boundary. Challenges are context specific, including, but not limited to

   - Lack of awareness;
   - Lack of capacity;
• Lack of quality data and information;
• Weak regulation and enforcement of food safety and food standards;
  o Lack of policies and regulations;
  o Lack of human capacity to enforce these regulations;
  o Lack of monitoring
• Multiple agencies to deal with the same issues

4. The session suggests that at least the following 3 actions are needed in order to better build resilience to FBD and public health shocks in this region and beyond:
• Capacity building;
• Getting the public buy-in, especially governments, needs evidence-based assessment and argument. Specifically, there is a need to
  o Put economic values on to the issues;
  o Measure the cost-effectiveness of policies and interventions;
• Need much broader collaboration between governments and NGOs, individuals, and rural leaders. And this coordination should go beyond sectoral, national, regional and global levels. There is a need for integrated efforts and cohesion between ministries, sectors, and countries. This is especially true considering the trade and mobility of resources and factors in this region.

5. There are some positive experiences that we can draw from this panel:
   a. Providing incentives to farmers to perform good farming practices;
   b. Organizing farmers into farmer associations and providing them with institutional support through extension services, training, etc.;
   c. Building up the capacity of consumers in the informal market at the local communities;
   d. Community initiated good practices with help from researchers;
   e. Recognizing differentiated gender role as women usually are “risk managers” in food preparation in this region. The capacity of women themselves also needs to be strengthened.

6. During the Q&A part, the following points were raised and discussed:
• Evidence tends to be distorted by political considerations and the media. So in dealing with FBD and public health shocks, how can we deal more intelligently with political and media bias?
• Governments should take a landscape approach to understand the problems, to understand farmers, etc.
• Where and how for scientists from different disciplines and different countries interlink with each other so that evidence could be provided in a more efficient way? Especially in terms of global data sharing?
• How to transfer knowledge from research to the ground level? And vice versa?

>This note was prepared by the session rapporteur.